

## **Japan must urgently implement CEDAW recommendations to ensure gender equality and protect women's human rights, life, and health**

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Tsuyoshi Masuda

President, Japan Federation of Democratic Medical Institutions (Min-iren)

Riho Kagami

Director, Min-iren Center for Human Rights and Ethics

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) conducted its first face-to-face session with the Japanese government in eight years and on October 29 released concluding reviews (60 items), including recommendations. It pointed out the existence of institutions and social systems unfair to women in a wide range of fields, all of which are critically related to women's human rights, life, and health and thus must be redressed urgently.

The CEDAW identifies the following six points as positive aspects: abolition of the period prohibiting women from remarrying, compensation for victims who had been forcibly sterilized under the Eugenic Protection Law, raising of the age of sexual consent from 13 to 16, revision of the Law on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims, raising of the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both men and women, and establishment of consultation procedures for sexual harassment and pregnancy and childbirth-related harassment. Civil society, such as women and concerned groups, has persistently raised their voices on these issues.

On the other hand, regarding the fact that Japan has failed to ratify the optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for nearly 40 years since it ratified the Convention in 1985, the Committee strictly stated that Japan takes too long to consider the ratification and that its efforts are extremely inadequate. (115 out of 189 state parties have ratified it.) It also recommended the establishment of an independent national human rights institution and stressed that the parliament as the legislative power should play an important role in the full implementation of the Convention. It also calls for gender parity in politics (50:50).

Furthermore, the CEDAW listed the following four follow-up items (requiring Japan to report on the status of their implementation within two years): a system to allow married couples to have separate surnames, reduction of the deposit for women running for parliamentary office from 3 million yen, provision of adequate access to emergency contraception and other contraceptive methods (including elimination of parental consent requirements for 16- and 17-year-olds to access them), and amendment of laws to remove spousal consent requirements for abortion. The option for married couples to have different surnames can be introduced immediately as most political parties pledge to do so.

The Committee expressed concern and recommended improvements regarding the lack of a comprehensive and clear definition of discrimination against women and negative impacts of patriarchal attitudes and gender

stereotypes on women's human rights.

Abortion is a crime in Japan and permitted only on a limited basis under the Maternal Health Law with spousal consent requirements. The Committee recommended legalizing abortion and removing the requirements so that women and girls can receive safe abortions and adequate post-abortion care. It also demanded the implementation of comprehensive sex education and stressed that politicians and public officials should not interfere with its contents.

Calling for the introduction of same-sex marriage, the CEDAW urged Japan to follow the Supreme Court's decision in 2023 and amend Article 3 of the gender identity disorder special case law to ensure that those who had to undergo sterilization receive effective compensation.

The Committee expressed concern over the increase in poverty and sexual exploitation of women due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It called for eliminating gender wage gap, increasing regular employment for women, and redressing unstable employment for single parents and elderly women. It recommended the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and the prevention and punishment of sexual violence against women by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa.

From the standpoint of protecting women's human rights, life, and health as well as SRHR (sexual and reproductive health and rights), Min-iren demands that the government and the Diet take the recommendations seriously and implement them as soon as possible.